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SUBJECT: EU, CANADA CONDEMN HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION

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Summary

11. (SBU) In recent days, the EU and Canada have issued statements expressing concern about the human rights situation in Vietnam and calling on the GVN to release all non-violent political prisoners. The GVN rejected in familiar terms the EU's statement, noting that Vietnam has always respected the freedoms of speech and democracy. These statements are welcome additions to USG and other criticism of the GVN crackdown on political dissent. We will continue to work with our colleagues from other like-minded embassies to encourage similar statements from their governments. End Summary.

EU, Canada Issue Statements

12. (SBU) In recent days, both the EU and Canada have issued statements expressing concern about the human rights situation in Vietnam (full texts of statements in paragraphs 6 and 7). The EU statement, issued by the Germany Presidency on May 15, notes with great concern the trials and sentencing of Father Nguyen Van Ly, human rights lawyers Nguyen Van Dai and Le Thi Cong Nhan and others. It further calls on the GVN to release all non-violent political prisoners and abide by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as Vietnam's own Constitution. According to a senior colleague at an EU-member embassy in Hanoi, "the French, Germans and Swedes have been out in front on this one. We have them to thank for this human rights statement, the last of which was in 2003."

13. (SBU) The Canadian statement, read May 18 by Deepak Obhrai, a Canadian MP and Parliamentary Secretary to the Foreign Minister, calls the GVN's recent actions against dissidents violations of the principles of freedom of expression and tolerance for peaceful opposition. It also urges the GVN to release all political prisoners and respect international standards of human rights.

GVN Responds

14. (SBU) Responding to the EU's Statement, on May 16 Foreign

Ministry Spokesperson Le Dzung said that Vietnam is "disappointed" with the statement regarding Vietnam's "treatment of a group of recently convicted criminals...These people abused the right to freedom in order to negatively affect national security, social order and stability." Repeating virtually verbatim the language used to reject U.S. Congressional and other criticism of Vietnam, Dzung said that "the State of Vietnam has always respected the rights to freedom and democracy, including the freedom of speech...No one is arrested due to his or her political or religious beliefs. Only those who have breached the law are punished in accordance with the law."

Comment

15. (SBU) The EU and Canadian statements are welcome additions to USG, Congressional and other criticism of the GVN crackdown on political dissent. We will continue to work with our colleagues from like-minded embassies, including Australia, New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland, to encourage similar statements from their governments. End Comment.

16. (SBU) Begin text of EU Statement:

Declaration of the Presidency on Behalf of the European Union on the Sentencing of Human Rights Defenders in Vietnam.

The EU has noted with great concern that several peaceful human rights defenders have been arrested and given long prison sentences on charges of "conducting propaganda against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam". On March 30, Father Nguyen Van Ly, Nguyen Phong and Nguyen Binh Thanh were sentenced to eight, six and five years' imprisonment respectively by the People's Court of Thua Thien Hue Province. On May 10, Nguyen Bac Truyen, Huynh Nguyen Dao and Le Nguyen Sang were sentenced to three, four and five years' imprisonment respectively by the People's Court of Ho Chi Minh City.

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On May 11 the People's Court of Hanoi sentenced lawyers Nguyen Van Dai to five years' imprisonment plus four years' "administrative probation" (house arrest) and Le Thi Cong Nhan to four years' imprisonment plus three years' "administrative probation". On May 15, Tran Quoc Hien was sentenced to five years' imprisonment and two years' "administrative probation" by the People's Court of Ho Chi Minh City.

The EU reiterates its plea to the Government of Vietnam to release all non-violent political activists who have simply exercised their rights to freedom of expression and association as guaranteed in article 69 of the Vietnamese Constitution and in articles 19 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Vietnam is a party.

The EU will continue its ongoing dialogue process with Vietnam, of which the established EU-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue is an integral part.

End text of EU Statement.

17. (SBU) Begin text of Canadian Statement

Mr. Speaker, over the past few months, Vietnam has been cracking down on peaceful political activists. Since March 30, seven Vietnamese activists have been found guilty in four trials and given jail sentences ranging from three years to eight years for spreading propaganda against the state.

These actions violate the principles of freedom of expression and tolerance for peaceful opposition. Canada calls on the government of Vietnam to release all political prisoners and to respect the international standards for human rights to which it has freely adhered. Vietnam has a duty as an ASEAN member country and an increasingly engaged member of the international community to respect these fundamental rights.

Canada urges the Vietnamese government to respect an individual's right to a fair trial. The promotion and protection of human rights forms the central part of Canada's relationship with Vietnam. Canada will therefore continue to urge Vietnam to ensure that the right to freedom of expression and due process are fully respected.

End text of Canadian Statement.

MARINE